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ABSTRACT

Sexism is a social issue in the U.S. which is suggested both by the popular press and the scholarly world. Teachers of English, psychologists, publishers, the U.S. government, the legal field, dictionaries, and especially the women's movement have commented upon and have been involved in the study of sexism, and in the advocacy of change toward more equality. Semantic stereotyping occurs in certain elements across cultures, which can be seen by comparing the written annual reports of selected U.S. and German companies. Neuter terms occur in publications of both cultures, but gender marking is both visually and linguistically evident across cultures; plural subjects are frequent and thereby demand neuter pronouns, but suggest plurality of groups rather than avoidance of sexism; use of generic "he" is infrequent with more use given to the sex-specified pronoun; and women's names as part of an annual report are non-existent in both cultures. Of the two cultures, the German annual report appears to be more male-oriented. However, although more females appear in the U.S. annual report, they are often portrayed in stereotyped roles. (Author/MHP)

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Semantic Polarization as a Measure of Sexism in Language

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These words appear in 1st Timothy:

> "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broiled hair or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with subjection. [1.]

Women in the United States and in Europe, would argue that such inferior treatment must end. Promptly. Decisively. And the momentum for change is carried in one word: sexism. We mean by this term an arbitrary communication of stereotypes, roles, and characteristics based primarily on gender.

Another definition is that "Sexism refers to all those attitudes and actions which demean or stereotype individuals or groups because of their sex." [2.] I suspect one could use the German phrase geschlectliches stereotyp as a translation.

In this paper our focus is therefore on verbal and some visual discrimination, as it appears toward either sex: individually or as a group.

Our goal is two fold: (1) to suggest that sexual stereotyping is a social issue in the United States; and (2) to compare selected U.S. publications with selected German publications in determining the degree of semantic stereotyping across cultures.

I.

SEXISM AS A SOCIAL ISSUE

Popular Periodicals

One would assume that the popular press is in contact with the mores, attitudes of society. If that is true, then Life Magazine in 1970 reflected the concern of some women who were unhappy that language compared them to food. They were displeased at being called cookies, honey, sugar. Nor, did they like to be viewed as things: as black widow spiders, hurricanes, or even, wall flowers.[3.]

A more serious treatment of sexism appeared in 1972. The five-page New York Times story suggested that the neologism gen be used in place of the generic term man. Furthermore, the authors noted that the terms masculine and feminine were sexist, i.e., the meaning of these words relied upon concepts of cultural stereotypes.[4.]

Psychology Today in August 1972 commented briefly on sexism and language in an article entitled "The Liberated Lady has a Dirty Mouth." The conclusion drawn was that women were using cuss words adopted by men. Men on the other hand were not adopting terms favored by women.[5.]

Redbook, also in 1974, took a forthright stance on the issue of obscenity and women. In obscenity, the article implied, is a polarization of imagery which depicted women in crude sexual terms.[6.]

Scholarly Statements

Inferential statements, subjective musings, strident proclamations of the popular press were soon joined by more subdued scholarly statements.

Persons who attended the largest professional organization in the U.S., the Modern Language Association, may have heard a 1970 session entitled "Linguistic Behavior of Male and Female." Subsequently this seminal topic appeared in the publication Linguistics.[7.]

"The New Rhetoric of Women Power" listed some words adopted by women out of the protest movement of the 60's. The author suggested that nouns ending in tion or cion found their way into rhetoric of women:[8.]

coercion
confrontation
agitation

An interesting study was reported in the American Sociologist. Briefly, an attempt was made to test the influence of the terms man and people as affecting material to be included in a basic sociology text. Half of the students in the study were given chapter titles--for which they were to find pictorial information--with the term man included; the other half received chapter titles with the term people included. The result was that students with man in their titles collected more male oriented material than did the other students working with the term people.[9.]

In 1974, at the Convention of the National Council of the Teachers of English, members adopted a resolution calling for guidelines to help insure nonsexist use of language. A draft was distributed to members and others in the organization. In 1975 the document Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications was distributed. This document received

wide distribution and has been a model for subsequent guidelines.[10.]

The American Psychologist also published guidelines for the purpose of "offsetting language bias and to present several alternatives for nonsexist writing."[11.]

Today scholarly momentum has not decreased. Nine articles in the winter 1978 issue of the Journal of Communication under the general heading of "What does 'She' Mean?" report a series of research studies, from the use of the generic masculine to the place of women's magazines in handling the issue of the Equal Rights Amendment.[12.]

Additional Comments

I cannot conclude this section without suggesting that statements on semantic stereotyping have proliferated beyond simple general concerns. Effects on American society are evident. Both professional and non-professional arenas of work have been impacted. In the following paragraphs let me provide a few additional samples:

Publishers. In the spring of 1970 Benjamin Bradlee of the Washington Post suggested that the dignity of women be upheld in writings for his newspaper. Writers should avoid terms such as divorcee, grandmother, and blonde as synonyms for woman.

McGraw-Hill Book Company President Alexander J. Burke, Jr. wrote, "We believe that educational and reference materials---should reflect a deep conviction that every human being has a dignity and worth that is her or his own..."[13.]

Scott, Foresman and Company specifically published a statement entitled Guidelines for Improving the Image of Women in Textbooks. One quotation is noteworthy: "Textbooks are sexist if they omit the actions and achievements of women, if they demean women by using patronizing language, or if they show women or men only in stereotyped roles with less than the full range of human interests..."[14.]

Macmillan also published a booklet entitled Guidelines for Creating Positive Sexual and Racial Images in Eeducational Materials.[15.]

Government. One of the significant attempts to eliminate discrimination in the U.S. government is the 1975 document entitled Job Title Revisions to Eliminate Sex- and Age-Referent Language from the Dictionary of Occupational Titles.[16.] Changes as the following occur:

Former titles	New titles
craneman	crane operator
stewardness	flight attendant
sauce girl	sauce canner
odd-shoe girl	odd-shoe examiner
knock-up man	knock-up assembler

I conclude this brief survey of some social concerns by suggesting that studies in other areas of communication continue. A fertile field of research is sexism in literature.

The judicial system is not immune. A recent study by Haig Bosmajian suggests that for years the language of law and politics has demeaned the position of women.[17.]

Studies of sexism in dictionaries is occurring. H. Lee Gershuny in a recent article states that there are innumerable

examples in dictionaries which present stereotyped definitions of the female.[18] And others.

In summary. I have little idea as to the spread of sexism--as we defined it earlier in this paper--in Europe. The issue is real in the United States. Changes in language, toward more equality are coming about. Even I have changed, or else would I, as a male, be presenting a paper on this subject?

II.

SEMANTIC SEXUAL STEREOTYPES ACROSS CULTURES

Since we have reviewed societal concerns of Americans about semantic stereotyping, the second portion of this paper will discuss sex stereotypes within different cultures: specifically, do sexual stereotypes occur in German business publications as well as their American counterparts? We have limited our analysis to the annual report.

Neuter terms

By neuter we mean those terms, usually nouns, which place either males or females into groups without reference to the sexual makeup of those groups.

Sex is not specified and the reader presumes that both males and females are members of the group.

The following examples of these neuter group terms are taken from German and American automobile, coal, steel, and chemical industries.

Neuter Business Related Terms

Angestellte	employees
	workforce
Belegschaftsmitglieder	crews
Anzubildende	wage earners
	salaried staff

Neuter General Terms

Erwachsene	adults
junge Menchen	physicians
	specialists
Personen	members
Menschen	partners

The above generic terms suggest, at first glance, that both the U.S. and German annual reports are neuter, devoid of sexual polarization. Does this mean that sexism is absent in these major company publications? No. Surely the neuter language appears to include both men and women, but my subsequent discussion will suggest something different.

Gender Marking

This phrase implies that whenever male or female workers are referred to semantically or pictorially, the representation will be a predictable male or female role. Note the following definitions from a recent dictionary:

> womanly: marked by qualities characteristic of a woman.
>
> manly: having qualities, appropriate to a man: bold, resolute; appropriate in a manner to a man.[19]

A perceptive reader will infer that the above definitions carry within them characteristics based on sex. Cultural stereotypes as to presumed behavior of males and females are

included in the very words which describe the concept called maleness and femaleness. The conception then is that roles, activities, behaviors--the whole gamut of human activities--can be catalogued into categories, promoting the idea of sex role stereotyping.

Female. Women are pictured as riding in cars, not driving them. Males are drivers; women are riders. No woman in both cultures is pictured doing hard physical labor.

Conversely, the few pictures of women in German annual reports show women shopping, purchasing food or goods, along with children. The perception is that women meet home responsibilities while the male members are "off to work."

German publications give a polite nod to women in business by showing them in recreational activity, or, learning in a class with other men and women.

Out of all the annual reports we viewed, only once did a woman appear as if engaged in technical activity: i.e., she had on a white coat and was looking at dials on an instrument.

More women appear in American publications. They are often present, however, as an adjunct to the product of the company; they too fit the stereotypes of females we defined earlier.[20].

Male. Male pictures predominate in German and American business publications. The expected role-stereotype of males engaged in hard manual labor is supported: in a hot steel

mill; in moving heavy equipment.

Directly opposite manual labor references are pictures of the Board of Directors or the Executive Committee. Members are male. They are formally posed. Only once in the German annual reports did we discover a woman--the same woman--as a member of the Board of Directors.[21, 22.]

Men are pictured in technical positions, i.e., they are shown at test stations, taking readings, recording information on pads, notebooks. No women, except one example, are shown in this capacity, neither in German or American reports.

Males also audit books, assume the role of accrediting the financial condition of the companies. Replete with titles, German accountants are all presumably male--no women's names are ever mentioned.

Plurals

One conclusion of our investigation was either the obvious or accidental attempt by German and American writers to use plural subjects, thereby requiring a subsequent plural pronoun.

Using the plural--and both German and American annual report writers use this technique--permits neuter pronouns as they, their, we, who, our.

Just as a sample the following list is included to illustrate the use of the plural:

	public accountants
Menschen	auditors
Erwachsene	employees
	crews
Gruppen	trainees

physicians
engineers

Pronouns

Our investigation also focused on pronoun usage: (1) used in a generic sense; and (2) used as a sex-specified part of speech. In English, for example, he may be used in two different semantic senses: as referring specifically to male, and, as a generic, general term without reference to sex of the subject.

My question is this: is he always used when referring to a non-sex specified person? A quick answer is no. Thus in the phrase "An employee may choose to have the assets in his account..." could just as well have included a feminine pronoun. The phrase could read, "An employee may choose to have the assets in her account."

Secondly, pronouns used as a sex-specified term parallels the conclusions reached by the American Heritage Dictionary.[23] and studies concluded by the Educational Testing Service.[24] Both studies suggested that the specific he to the generic he is as high as ten to one, again similar to the informal results obtained by Langendoen.[25]

Names of Male and Female

Finally, which proper name, male or female, occurs most often in the annual reports. One could hypothesize that a publication which has a perfect mix of males and females would have a compary truly representative of the population: half male, half female.

I said earlier that only once did the name of a woman appear: she was listed as being a member of the Board of Directors of a firm.

On the other hand, the proper names of men appeared more frequently, in the following situations:

1. As members of the Board of Directors - German and American reports.
2. As members of the Executive Committee. German.
3. As members who had retired and were replaced on the Board of Directors. German and American.
4. As being appointed as the President and Chief Operating Officer. German and American.
5. As auditors who performed the yearly audit. German.
6. As memorials for either Directors, Executive Members, or management employees. German.
7. As presidents or heads of subsidiary corporations. German and American.

Of the above, the strongest indicator that the world is masculine in German annual reports is the listing, in some instances, of those employees who have died while working for the company. In no instance did I read one memorial statement for a woman. Not only that, but the wording of the statement made the greatest use of sex-specific pronouns, as in the following example: "With his passing we mourn the loss of a man whose professional counsel and imaginative foresight contributed so decisively to the present standing of our Company. His vast knowledge and amiable personality shaped the close and successful cooperation with his associates who regarded him

with both esteem and affection."[26]

* * * *

We hope we have raised questions. We also hope that we have left the impression that some elements of American society are willing to attempt new insights into linguistic sexism.

In the business world, as inferred from viewing the verbal communication of some annual reports, communication is male oriented. It may continue to be so. Further research will indicate whether any changes will occur in the future.

Notes

1. 1 Timothy 2:9-11.

2. Guidelines for Improving the Image of Women in Textbooks. Scott, Foresman and Co. (1974). p. 1.

3. Ann Bayer. "A Women's Lib Expose' of Male Villainy." Life. (August 7, 1970). in: Alleen Pace Nilsen, Ed., Sexism and Language. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (1971). p. 2.

4. Casey miller and Kate Swift. "One Small Step for Genkind." New York Times Magazine. (April 16, 1972). pp. 36ff.

5. "The Liberated Lady has a Dirty Mouth." Psychology Today. (August 1972). p. 16.

6. Barbara Lawrence. "Dirty Words Can Harm You." Redbook. (May 1974). p. 33.

7. Mary Ritchie Key. "Linguistic Behavior of Male and Female." Linguistics. (August 15, 1972). pp. 15-31.

8. Margaret B. McDowell. "The New Rhetoric of Woman Power." The Midwest Quarterly. (Winter 1971). pp. 187-198.

9. Joseph W. Schneider and Sally L. Hacker. "Sex Role Imagery and Use of the Generic Man." American Sociologist. (February 1973). pp. 12-18.

10. Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications. NCTE. (197?).

11. "Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language." American Psychologist. (June 1975). pp. 682-684.

12. "What Does 'She' Mean?" Journal of Communication. (Winter 1978). pp. 130-192.

13. Guidelines for Equal Treatment of the Sexes in McGraw-Hill Book Company Publications. (nd). p. 1.

14. Guidelines for Improving the Image of Women in Textbooks. Scott, Foresman and Co. (1974). p. 1.

15. Guidelines for Creating Positive Sexual and Racial Images in Educational Materials. (Macmillan. (1975). preface.

16. Job Title Revisions to Eliminate Sex-and Age-Referent Language from the Dictionary of Occupational Titles. U.S. Department of Labor. (1975).

Notes continued

17. Haig Bosmajian. "Sexism in the Language of Legislatures and Courts." In: Nilsen, op. cit., pp. 77-104.

18. H. Lee Gershuny. "Sexism in Dictionaries and Texts: Omissions and Commissions." In: Ibid., pp. 143-149.

19. Webster's 7th New College Dictionary. G. and C. Merriam Co. (1969).

20. See particularly the letter concerning the position of women in pictures in an annual report in: Judy E. Pickens, et. al. Without Bias: A Guidebook for Nondiscriminatory Communication. International Association of Business Communicators. (1977). p. 16.

21. Report for the Year 1963. Volkswagenwerk Aktiengesellschaft Wolfsburg. (1963).

22. Bericht über das Geschäftsjahr 1968. Volkswagenwerk Aktiengesellschaft Wolfsburg. (1968).

23. Alma Graham. "The Making of a Non-Sexist Dictionary." Ms. (December 1973). pp. 12-16; also in Wendy Martyna. "What Does 'He' Mean?" Journal of Communication. (Winter 1978). pp. 131-138.

24. Women and Educational Testing Practices. Princeton. (1974).

25. D. Terrence Langendoen. Essentials of English Grammar. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. (1974).

26. Annual Report. VEBA-Chemie AG. (1974). p. 2.